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SUBJECT: HIV-AIDS PATIENTS IN POLAND

¶1. According to a panel of experts who met in Warsaw November 29, 22 years after the first HIV cases were noted in Poland, Poles continue to stigmatize and discriminate against HIV positive persons. The panel, made up of Polish doctors, nurses, and social workers from NGO's, met to mark World AIDS Day on December 1.

¶2. The incident of HIV/AIDS in Poland has been stable over the past decade. Official statistics show 550-650 cases of HIV and 120-175 cases of AIDS diagnosed each year from 1995 to 2005, the last year for which government figures are available. Since 1985, when the first cases of HIV were detected in Poland, a total of 11,225 persons have tested HIV positive, 2,013 have developed AIDS, and 900 have died.

¶3. While Poland has stabilized its incidence of HIV/AIDS, the panelists were generally critical of Poles' attitudes towards persons living with the disease. One speaker, a well-known television journalist who had worked as a correspondent in the U.S., contrasted the tolerant attitudes towards AIDS Day assemblies he had observed in New York with the hostility he believed such gatherings would attract in Poland. Another panelist, an academic and sociologist who works with HIV/AIDS patients, spoke of the level of discrimination the patients faced in Poland. She claimed that one third of the HIV/AIDS patients had experienced discrimination from medical professionals, including being refused dental treatment and hip surgery, solely because of the fear of HIV infection. She also reported on several cases of healthy children being refused entry to schools because it was known that their mothers were HIV positive.

¶4. There was a consensus among the panelists, as one speaker put it, "education, education, and more education" was the tool to combat discrimination. One panelist, a physician from the National AIDS Center, presented survey results showing that most Polish school children do not receive adequate education on the causes and risk factors of HIV/AIDS. Several panelists suggested that the students' inadequate training stemmed from the educational policies of the recently-defeated administration of prime minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski.

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